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SUBJECT: VISIT OF DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE TO MALI,
COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES MINISTERIAL

REF: A. BAMAKO 1339
B. BAMAKO 1336

¶1. Summary: The Deputy Secretary's November 14-15 visit to Mali as head of the U.S. delegation to the Community of Democracies (CD) Ministerial reaffirmed our strong bilateral ties and sent a clear message of support for Mali's CD Presidency. During the CD Meeting, the Deputy met with representatives from NGOs from non-democratic countries, participated in the launch of a working group bringing together democracies in the Asia-Pacific region, and engaged with delegates from other democratic states. On the bilateral side, he met with President Toure and FM Ouane (septel) and reached out to Mali's own civil society. The Deputy's press conference with a variety of Malian and international correspondents highlighted the strength of U.S.-Malian relations and clarified U.S. military engagement in the North of the country. End summary

U.S. - Strong Support for Mali's CD Presidency

¶2. The Deputy Secretary's visit, beginning with his arrival via Timbuktu, received prominent and positive press coverage (reftel A). His acknowledgment of Mali's long tradition of religious tolerance and Islamic scholarship during his calls on Muslim leaders in the brief stop in Timbuktu further reaffirmed the positive message carried by the U.S. delegation. The Deputy's presence and his role as opening ceremony speaker, along with Ambassador Danilovich's participation in the CD opening, communicated strong U.S. support for the Community of Democracies and our appreciation to Mali for its chairmanship during the last year.

CD - Meeting with NGO Representatives from Undemocratic States

¶3. The Deputy Secretary's meeting with representatives of NGO's from non-democratic countries (defined as CD observer countries or countries not invited) on the margins of the Ministerial provided them an opportunity to voice specific concerns:

--Joel Brito, International Group for Social Corporate Responsibility (Cuba): Noted that President Bush's recent speech on Cuba was well-received among the opposition.

--Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Activist, American University of Cairo (Egypt): Wished to elevate the fate of imprisoned journalists and the importance of a free press. Noted that democracy had been good for Africa, but said there were still cases of special concern, including Egypt. They added that Ethiopia was no longer following a democratic agenda, and they urged the United States to help put Ethiopia back on the right track.

--Reza Eslami-Somea, Professor, University of Shahid Beheshti (Iran): NGO representatives noted the need for further academic and cultural exchanges, but complained that these exchanges were frequently frustrated by the difficulties in obtaining U.S. visas.

--Oyo Obe, Civil Liberties Organization and Chair of the World Movement for Democracy (Nigeria): Emphasized the importance of involving civil society in the democratization process.

--Yuri Dzhibladze, Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia): Expressed their interests in promoting greater communication between NGO's, noting that the government controlled nearly all the mass media but that the internet provided a way to publish and make available to the public much more material.

--Mohsen Marzouk, Kawakibi, Center for Democratic Transition (Tunisia): Urged a stronger diplomatic and Embassy role in supporting democracy, and encouraged NGO's to be more active in promoting their effectiveness and results. Stated need for regional and local strategy. Said they had plenty of money, "maybe too much," but did not know how to best spend it.

--Carlos Ponce, Justice Consortium and Milos Alcalay, former Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN (Venezuela): Would like to see a regional NGO support network. Asked for greater involvement and support from regional organizations such as the OAS. The NGO representatives argued that these regional organizations were needed to actively counter Venezuelan President Chavez' funding of anti-democratic programs in Nicaragua and Bolivia,

--Vo Van Ai, Que Me: Action for Democracy on Vietnam (Vietnam): Raised their concern over plight of political prisoners. Saw the economy opening and rise in number of democratic activists.

--John Makumbe, University of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe): Asked what additional resources might be made available to them (Embassy note: they were provided information on draft legislation, the "Democracy Development Act," that if passed may provide financial aid to pro-democracy advocates who are victimized by the state due to their political activities.)

CD - Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership

¶4. The Deputy Secretary also hosted a working breakfast to discuss the creation of an Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership, to bring established democracies from the region together to create a framework for supporting neighboring emerging democracies. The Canadian, Mongolian, South Korean, and the Philippines representatives whole-heartedly supported the initiative, while several others suggested a slower approach. Also in attendance were representatives of Australia, India, Indonesia, and Japan. The group agreed to meet again in early 2008, in Asia, at a date yet to be determined. In the meantime, the USG will produce a new non-paper on the proposed APDP structure and priorities, and

engage in further bilateral discussions to pave the way for the larger group meeting.

Bilateral - Mali's Civil Society

15. Representatives of Malian civil society told the Deputy Secretary of their concerns about forms of slavery still

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practiced in Mali, and the opposition of Imams and Muslim groups to President Toure's proposal to amend Mali's Family Code and abolish the death penalty (reftel B). Malian women's groups expressed reservations at challenging the Imams in their contention that the death penalty was in keeping with Koranic principles. Representatives of the women's groups and religious leaders were both unhappy that the President had announced the proposals without consulting civil society.

Press Conference

16. During a brief press conference on the eve of his departure, the Deputy Secretary told the Malian press corps that, as one of Mali's oldest allies, the U.S. is committed to reinforcing Mali's democratic tradition. He noted that Mali benefits from a broad range of U.S. assistance programs, including USAID, the MCC, the President's Malaria Initiative, and Military humanitarian assistance. Malian journalists were particularly interested in U.S. military assistance to Mali and rumors of a U.S. military base in northern Mali. The Deputy Secretary dispelled these rumors, stating that the

U.S. has no intention of installing a military base in the north. He said members of the U.S. military present in northern Mali were there only to provide counter-terrorism training to the Malian military. In response to questions regarding AFRICOM, the Deputy Secretary said the U.S. continued to consult with African countries about the location of AFRICOM headquarters, which is currently located in Germany. Following the press conference, some Malian newspapers speculated that Mali figures high on the list of potential AFRICOM sites.

17. The Deputy Secretary's staff has cleared this message.
McCulley